

“ill disposed persons” to “immediately desist from all unlawful practices and all turbulent conduct” even as he counseled “good and law abiding citizens not to allow themselves to become excited by any appeals that may be made to their passions and prejudices . . . but to keep cool heads.” He commanded judges and officers of the law to bring offenders to trial and to protect the civil rights of all citizens. Further, Russell commanded that troublemakers from outside the state should leave “upon pain of being arrested and dealt with according to law.”³⁵

In response to Russell’s fears of violence and as a follow-up to correspondence between Russell and the county’s Democratic Party leaders, Rev. Peyton Hoge of the First Presbyterian Church penned a letter to the governor on November 5. Hoge reassured Russell that he had been in contact with “several prominent members of the campaign committee and [had] positive assurances from them” that the election would proceed peacefully. Hoge further explained that “if negroes do as Henderson advised them: go to the polls and cast their ballots quietly and go home; I have no idea that there will be any disturbance.” Hoge provided a bit of insight into the mindset of the white leaders when he stated that “members of our committee feel that their honor is involved in seeing that this agreement is carried out in good faith.”³⁶

³⁵ *Wilmington Messenger*, October 26, 1898.

³⁶ Hoge and other ministers also joined in the final rhetoric when they were requested by Democratic Party leaders to build their sermons around specific chapters in the Bible that reinforced the white supremacy arguments. The ministers also participated in rallies and the riot, carrying guns alongside their parishioners. The Bible chapters were indicated as being Isaiah, Chapter 17, verse 14 and Jeremiah, Chapter 25, verse 35. J. Allen Kirk, *Statement of Facts Concerning the Bloody Riot in Wilmington, N.C. of Interest to Every Citizen in the*

Election Day

The night before the election, both sides readied for what all thought would be a day of violence. The White Government Unions held a joint meeting at the courthouse where “red hot speeches were made” and it was “clearly evident that white men [would] have the victory, cost what it may.”³⁷ The same day, African American ministers called upon the community to have a day of fasting and prayer, to demonstrate their dedication to preserving the peace.³⁸ Other, more militant, African Americans met at Ruth Hall, and although their discussions have not been recorded as well as those of the whites at the courthouse, Democratic Party papers claimed that two of the speakers present encouraged listeners to “go to the polls tomorrow and raise h---l.”³⁹ The white leadership, vested in the Secret Nine, apparently became alarmed at this point because the threat of violence was very real and jeopardized their plans to control the overthrow of municipal government after the election as well as the validity of the election itself.⁴⁰

Election day dawned “bright and clear” on November 8, 1898 as a tense city and state prepared to vote.⁴¹ Statewide, voters took to the polls in record numbers with few incidents of violence reported. In Wilmington, white men were armed and prepared for the day with patrols posted on every block. The polls opened at seven in the morning and closed at sundown,

United States, online edition available at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/kirk/menu.html>.

³⁷ For more on this meeting, see *Washington Post*, November 8, 1898 and the *Atlanta (Ga.) Constitution*, November 8, 1898.

³⁸ Kirk, *Statement of Facts*.

³⁹ *Morning Post* (Raleigh), November 9, 1898.

⁴⁰ McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 633.

⁴¹ The *Raleigh News and Observer* noted that the city was tense yet ready for whatever happened. *News and Observer*, (Raleigh), November 8, 1898.